



BEARSTONE LLC

WHAT VENDOR ACCOUNTABILITY LOOKS LIKE

A 30-MONTH TELECOM
GOVERNANCE CASE STUDY

*How a Multi-Brand Retail
Portfolio Recovered \$1.85M
in Carrier Overcharges
and Reduced Its Annual
Telecom Budget by 16.9%*

AT-A-GLANCE RESULTS

Source: SPARC Value workbook (Jan 2023–Jul 2025)

\$2,122,436	Total carrier overcharges identified
\$1,852,314	Credits recovered — 87% collection rate
\$270,122	Currently in active dispute resolution
\$120,584	Early termination fees waived through contract management
16.9%	Reduction in expected telecom budget, FY2024 → FY2025
95%	Invoice coverage in BearGuard™ (114 of 120 monthly invoices)
30 months	Engagement period: January 2023 – July 2025
2 carriers	Granite Communications and AT&T

The Client

SPARC Group LLC operates a multi-brand retail portfolio — Aeropostale/Nautica, Brooks Brothers, Eddie Bauer, Forever 21, Lucky Brand, and Reebok — across hundreds of store locations throughout the United States.

That footprint is not static. Store openings, relocations, and closings occur continuously across all six brands, often simultaneously. Each transition generates carrier activity: new circuits provisioned, old ones cancelled, billing accounts updated, contract terms triggered. The governance challenge isn't just invoice volume — it's the rate of change.

The Governance Gap

Before Bearstone, SPARC's telecom environment had no centralized inventory, no systematic invoice validation process, and no dedicated dispute management function. Carrier invoices were processed and paid. Billing errors accumulated.

The pattern Bearstone identified on engagement is consistent with what we see across enterprise clients: unused services continuing to bill after store closings, outdated rates persisting after contract changes, bandwidth tiers that no longer matched active site requirements, and charges at locations that had been decommissioned. These aren't isolated incidents. They are the predictable result of a vendor relationship that operates without governance structure.

No carrier is responsible for catching errors that benefit the carrier. That responsibility belongs to the enterprise — and it requires a continuous process, not a periodic review.

The five recurring billing errors Bearstone identifies most consistently:

- Services continuing to bill after confirmed cancellation
- Outdated rates not updated following contract changes
- Bandwidth tiers over-provisioned relative to current site needs
- Bundled surcharges applied without contractual basis
- Active billing at sites that have been closed or relocated

The BearGuard™ Governance Process

Bearstone onboarded SPARC's full portfolio to BearGuard™, Bearstone's vendor governance platform, establishing a continuous monthly governance cycle across all brands and both carriers.

Living Inventory Management

BearGuard maintains a current, accurate record of every circuit, line, and service — by brand, by store, by carrier — updated in real time to reflect store openings, relocations, and closings. This becomes the system of record that all invoice validation runs against. Without an accurate inventory, invoice discrepancies cannot be identified with precision. SPARC's team went from estimating their telecom footprint to knowing it.

Monthly Invoice Validation

Every invoice from Granite and AT&T is ingested into BearGuard and validated line-by-line against the current inventory and contract terms. Charges are classified as matching, within tolerance, or flagged for dispute. A Red/Yellow/Green variance report surfaces only true exceptions — so the SPARC team reviews decisions, not raw data. Of 120 monthly invoices over the engagement period, 114 were processed through BearGuard's automated validation (≈95% coverage).

Dispute Management and Resolution

When a billing discrepancy is confirmed, Bearstone files the dispute directly with the carrier — using carrier-formatted forms and CSV-level evidence sourced from the carrier's own billing data. Every open dispute is tracked through to resolution and credit confirmation. Carriers respond differently when disputes arrive with documentation they cannot refute.

Vendor Accountability Reviews

Bearstone conducts regular structured reviews with Granite and AT&T, maintaining a documented record of outstanding issues, committed credits, and resolution timelines. This creates a formal accountability relationship between SPARC and its carriers — one where unresolved issues don't disappear between billing cycles.

Contract Management

When store closures triggered early termination fee obligations across multiple brands, Bearstone managed the carrier negotiation directly. The result: \$120,584 in ETF fees waived — across Aeropostale, Lucky Brand, Reebok, Eddie Bauer, Nautica, and the SPARC parent entity. Bearstone also provided quoting and fulfillment for new store openings and relocations, contract consulting and renewal negotiations, and project management for brand acquisitions and technology upgrades.

The Outcomes

Financial Results (January 2023 – July 2025)

- \$2,122,436 in carrier overcharges identified across all brands and both carriers
- \$1,852,314 in credits recovered — an 87% collection rate
- \$270,122 currently in active dispute resolution
- \$120,584 in early termination fees waived through carrier contract negotiation
- 16.9% reduction in SPARC’s expected telecom budget from FY2024 to FY2025

Brand-Level Breakdown

Overcharges Identified → Credits Recovered → Remaining Balance

Brand	Identified	Recovered	Remaining / Notes
Aeropostale/Nautica	\$975,194	\$872,747	\$102,447
Brooks Brothers	\$6,105	\$199	\$5,906
Eddie Bauer	\$267,975	\$367,225	(–\$99,250) — credits exceeded disputes; historical billing corrections applied
Forever 21	\$531,001	\$286,295	\$244,706
Lucky Brand	\$264,413	\$271,228	(–\$6,815) — credits exceeded disputes
Reebok	\$77,749	\$54,621	\$23,129

Source: SPARC Value workbook, Bearstone Value tab.

Operational Outcomes

- A single, accurate, always-current inventory of all telecom services across all brands and carriers — enabling budget forecasting with confidence rather than estimation.
- Recurring billing error detection on a monthly cadence, preventing the re-accumulation of errors between review cycles. Bearstone’s client base experiences approximately 10% monthly carrier over-billing on average; the governance process prevents that baseline from compounding.
- Full-spectrum billing visibility: when Office@Hand invoices were identified as under-billing, that variance was surfaced to the SPARC finance team as well — no payment surprises in either direction.
- A documented dispute and credit history across Granite and AT&T, accessible to the SPARC team at any time for budgeting, forecasting, and carrier negotiations.
- Carrier relationship structure: SPARC’s vendors now operate knowing their invoices are validated every month. That accountability is itself a governance outcome.

What This Means Beyond the Numbers

The 16.9% budget reduction from FY2024 to FY2025 is the most significant long-term indicator in this engagement. It reflects not just errors corrected but services right-sized, contracts enforced, and a vendor environment that SPARC’s carriers now know is actively monitored.

There is a compounding return on vendor governance that does not exist in a one-time billing review. When carriers know that invoices will be validated monthly and discrepancies will be disputed with their own data, billing accuracy improves over time. The governance process creates the accountability condition. The financial outcomes follow from it.

The \$1,852,314 in recovered credits is the backward-looking result. The 16.9% budget reduction is the forward-looking one. Both are products of the same process: continuous, methodical vendor accountability.

“We’ve never met with a company and not found overbilling — often without changing carriers.”

— Bill Henrichs, President, Bearstone LLC

Why Bearstone and BearGuard™

BearGuard is not a software subscription. It is a managed governance process — monthly invoice validation, active dispute management, living inventory, and direct carrier engagement — operated by a team that has spent decades on both sides of the enterprise telecom relationship.

Bearstone’s founders and team members have held senior roles at AT&T, CenturyLink, and Simon Property Group. We know how enterprise carrier contracts are written, how billing systems process charges, and where the gaps between contract terms and invoice reality consistently appear.

The financial results above are what happens when vendors are held accountable to what their contracts actually say — not once, but every month.

BearGuard™ delivers:

- Monthly invoice validation against contract terms and living inventory
- Dispute management filed with carrier-level evidence and tracked to resolution
- Always-current inventory that serves as your telecom system of record
- Structured vendor accountability reviews that carriers take seriously
- Contract management through transitions — openings, closings, acquisitions, renewals

If you haven’t validated your telecom invoices against your contract terms in the last 90 days, you are almost certainly overpaying.

Start with a 3-minute risk assessment or request the Bearstone Executive Brief:

3-Minute Telecom Risk Assessment
BearstoneLLC.com/quiz

Bearstone Executive Brief
BearstoneLLC.com/executivebrief